

OPENING ADDRESS

BY

THE HON. JIM SIMMONDS, M.P.

AT THE

FORUM ON WORKER CO-OPERATIVES

SUNDAY, 14 OCTOBER 1984

10.30 A.M.

:

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR WORKER CO-OPERATIVES

THIS WORKSHOP IS A TIMELY RECOGNITION OF THE INCREASING SIGNIFICANCE OF WORKER CO-OPERATIVES IN VICTORIA.

THE GOVERNMENT IS COMMITTED TO SUPPORTING WORKER CO-OPERATIVES PROVIDED THEY DEMONSTRATE THE POTENTIAL TO BECOME ECONOMICALLY VIABLE AND ARE COMMITTED TO CO-OPERATIVE AND INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE.

WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO DO IS TO BRIEFLY COMMENT ON HOW THIS COMMITMENT IS BEING MET BY THE MINISTRY OF EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING AND TO RESPOND IN PART TO SOME RECENT COMMENT AND CONCERNS EXPRESSED ON THIS ISSUE.

THE STATE BUDGET HAS PROVIDED \$720,000 FOR THE CO-OPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM. AN ADDITIONAL \$146,000 HAS ALREADY BEEN COMMITTED TO A CONVERSION CO-OPERATIVE AND A FURTHER \$200,000 SET ASIDE FOR FURTHER CONVERSION CO-OPERATIVES.

SOME OTHER INITIATIVES ARE BEING FUNDED FROM OTHER PROGRAM ALLOCATIONS - ALTHOUGH THE APPROVAL PROCESS AND GUIDELINES OF THE CO-OPERATIVE ARE APPLIED.

THE OVERALL COMMITMENT WILL BE WELL OVER \$1 MILLION. THIS IS ALREADY A VERY SIGNIFICANT COMMITMENT.

I AM CONSIDERING THE NEED AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A FURTHER ALLOCATION OF FUNDS TO THE PROGRAM.

I WOULD NOT LIKE TO LEAVE YOU IN ANY DOUBT AS TO MY SUPPORT FOR THIS PROGRAM AND MY CONFIDENCE IN WHAT CO-OPERATIVES CAN ACHIEVE.

HAVING SAID THAT, I WOULD LIKE NOW TO FOCUS ON CHANGES TO THE TYPE OF CO-OPERATIVES BEING SUPPORTED UNDER THE PROGRAM.

THE FIRST CONVERSION CO-OPERATIVE - GLASS GLOW INDUSTRIAL CO-OPERATIVE LTD HAS BEEN FUNDED. OTHER PROPOSALS ARE BEING DISCUSSED. A BUILDING AND MAINTENANCE CO-OPERATIVE, W.R. RENOVATIONS IS BEING SUPPORTED IN THE WESTERN SUBURBS.

TWO LEBANESE GROUPS HAVE BEEN ASSISTED. THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN OFFICERS OF MY MINISTRY AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE TURKISH, LATIN AMERICAN AND INDO-CHINESE COMMUNITIES CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF CO-OPERATIVES. ANOTHER CO-OPERATIVE CURRENTLY BEING SUPPORTED EMPLOYS INTELLECTUALLY DISABLED WORKERS.

I AM DELIGHTED BY THESE DEVELOPMENTS FOR THEY BROADEN THE SCOPE OF THE PROGRAM.

IT IS MY STRONG VIEW THAT WE SHOULD REJECT COMPLETELY THE VIEW THAT IF YOU ARE NOT AN ABLE BODIED WHITE MALE, ANGLO SAXON THAT YOU ARE INCAPABLE OF RUNNING A CO-OPERATIVE. CO-OPERATIVE UNDERSTANDING AND EXPERIENCE OF THESE GROUPS IS OFTEN QUITE SOPHISTICATED.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THESE CO-OPERATIVES HAS INDUCED THE PROVISION OF ADDITIONAL RESOURCES. THIS HAS TO BE PROVIDED TO COUNTERACT THE SOCIAL EDUCATIONAL AND PHYSICAL DISCRIMINATION EXPERIENCED BY THE MEMBERS OF THESE CO-OPERATIVES.

IT HAS TO BE REALISED THAT EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS DEMAND UNEQUAL RESOURCING IF OPPORTUNITIES AND OUTCOMES ARE TO BE EQUAL. THE TRANSLATION OF CO-OPERATIVE COURSE MATERIAL INTO TURKISH OR ARABIC, FOR INSTANCE IS BASED ON JUSTICE RATHER THAN WELFARE CONSIDERATIONS.

THE MINISTRY IS AWARE OF THE NEED NOT TO CREATE A DEPENDENCY SITUATION. IT SHOULD NOT BE ASSUMED THAT ADDITIONAL RESOURCES PRODUCE DEPENDENCY.

CRITICAL TO MY MINISTRY'S RESOURCING OF WORKER CO-OPERATIVES IS THE C.D.P. UNIT. THE TRANS NATIONAL CO-OPERATIVE AND LABOUR RESOURCE CENTRE REPORT ON WORKER CO-OPERATIVES IN NEW SOUTH WALES AND VICTORIA SUGGESTED THAT THERE WERE SOME CLEAR REQUIREMENTS FOR AN EFFECTIVE UNIT. THESE WERE; FIRST, THE UNIT SHOULD OPERATE INDEPENDENTLY FROM OTHER MINISTRY PROGRAMS.

SECOND, THE STAFF OF THE UNIT SHOULD HAVE CO-OPERATIVE EXPERIENCE, SKILLS AND COMMITMENT.

THIRD, OVERSIGHT FOR THE UNIT SHOULD BE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A SENIOR OFFICER WITH CONSIDERABLE AND PROVEN CO-OPERATIVE EXPERIENCE, SKILLS AND COMMITMENT.

FOURTH, THE UNIT REQUIRES A MINIMUM STAFFING LEVEL CONSISTENT WITH ITS COMPLEX AND SOPHISTICATED WORKLOAD. FIFTH, CONTINUITY OF STAFF IN THE UNIT.

I AGREE THAT THESE ARE IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS, AND FOLLOWING REPRESENTATIONS TO ME BY MEMBERS OF THE MACC WORKING GROUP ON WORKER CO-OPERATIVES I WILL BE EXAMINING HOW EFFECTIVELY THEY ARE BEING APPLIED.

THE MINISTRY'S ROLE IN CO-OPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT IS NOT JUST FOCUSED ON INDIVIDUAL CO-OPERATIVES. THE LONG TERM DEVELOPMENT OF A SUCCESSFUL CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT DEPENDS UPON A SOUND LEGISLATIVE AND SUPPORT BASE.

CONSIDERABLE RESOURCES HAVE BEEN MADE AVAILABLE TO THE MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF CO-OPERATION. THE FOLLOWING MACC RELATED ACTIVITIES HAVE BEEN FUNDED:

- A CO-OPERATIVE CONFERENCE
- THE CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION STUDY
- A RESEARCH WORKER FOR THE CDP FUNDED CO-OPERATIVES

THE WORKER CO-OPERATIVE WORKING PARTY IS BEING RESOURCED. THIS WORKSHOP WAS INITIATED BY THE WORKING PARTY AND HAS BEEN FUNDED.

THE CO-OPERATOR MAGAZINE IS BEING FUNDED. A SERIES OF CONVERSION CO-OPERATIVE WORKSHOPS WILL BE ORGANISED. A CO-OPERATIVE VIDEOTAPE HAS BEEN COMPLETED AND A SERIES OF INFORMATION PAMPHLETS ARE ALSO BEEN COMMISSIONED.

THE CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION COURSES BEING DEVELOPED IN CONJUNCTION WITH PRESTON TAFE ARE UNIQUE IN AUSTRALIA. WHAT IS BEING ACHIEVED, HOWEVER, SHOULD NOT BLIND US TO THE NEED FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT.

WORKER CO-OPERATIVES ARE BEGINNING TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR VIABILITY AS ONGOING ECONOMIC ENTERPRISES. I RECOGNISE THAT ECONOMIC VIABILITY WILL NOT IN ITSELF ENSURE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SIGNIFICANT WORKER CO-OPERATIVE SECTOR.

WORKER CO-OPERATIVES NEED TO ORGANISE AND A PROPOSAL FOR A FEASIBILITY STUDY INTO ESTABLISHING A WORKER CO-OPERATIVE ASSOCIATION IS CURRENTLY UNDER CONSIDERATION.

IN CONCLUSION, THERE IS A LIMIT TO WHAT THE GOVERNMENT COULD AND SHOULD DO TO SUPPORT WORKER CO-OPERATIVES. THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD ESTABLISH AN APPROPRIATE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK AND RESOURCE THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDIVIDUAL WORKER CO-OPERATIVES AND THE WORKER CO-OPERATIVE SECTOR. THE FUTURE OF WORKER CO-OPERATIVES, HOWEVER, EQUALLY DEPENDS ON A NUMBER OF INTER-RELATED FACTORS :

FIRST, THE ABILITY OF EXISTING CO-OPERATIVES TO ACHIEVE ECONOMIC VIABILITY AND DEMOCRATIC WORKPLACE PRACTICES.

SECOND, THE ONGOING PROVISION OF TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE.

THIRD, THE FULL UNIONISATION OF THE EXISTING CO-OPERATIVES.

FOURTH, THE SUCCESSFUL CONVERSION OF UNIONISED COMPANIES INTO CO-OPERATIVES.

FIFTH, TRADE UNION SUPPORT FOR WORKER CO-OPERATIVES.

SIXTH, THE ABILITY AND WILLINGNESS OF THE CO-OPERATIVES TO SET NEW STANDARDS OF WORKING CONDITIONS FOR WORKERS.